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## **Secretariat memorandum**

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Agenda item

CAC004

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### **Internal monitoring of the origin of telephone enquiries**

#### **1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To outline the quantity and type of telephone enquiries being dealt with by London TravelWatch, and to consider whether changes should be made to current procedures to reduce the impact on workload and quantity of telephone enquiries in future.
- 1.2 As a result of the recent recommendation of the London Assembly review, members have asked that further internal monitoring be undertaken to better understand the content and impact of telephone enquiries on the casework team. In particular, members wished to be confident that any change to existing arrangements would not disadvantage passengers.

#### **2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That members consider further the value of maintaining London TravelWatch's telephone number on buses in the light of the internal monitoring of the content and resource impact of telephone enquiries.

#### **3 Current position**

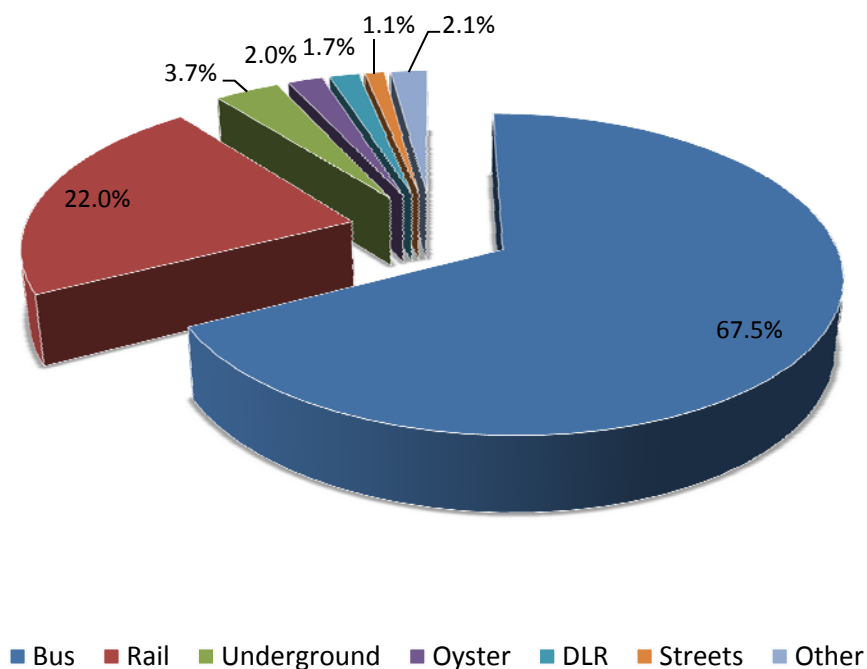
- 3.1 In relation to the London Assembly's recommendation, it is important to note the current position regarding publicising our details. Under their franchise agreements, train companies are required to publicise our details. This is done in a combination of ways – through Passenger Charters, posters on trains and at stations.
- 3.2 In relation to Transport for London services, posters are located at every London Underground and Docklands Light Railway station and on every tram and bus. While the posters located at London Underground stations and on trams do not include our telephone number, those on buses and at Docklands Light Railway stations do. Our telephone number and website address are also provided on Transport for London's MetroTravel page in the Metro.

- 3.4 The London Assembly’s review working group argued that our contact details should be completely removed from buses, which would appear to be contrary to the arrangements at every rail and underground station in the London area. However, as noted, arrangements currently differ between operators and within Transport for London modes as to whether our telephone number should be included on posters.
- 3.5 London Buses regularly reviews the content of posters. The current poster design dates from January this year and is expected to be on all buses by April. We have been informed that the next occasion that these posters will be reviewed will be in April.

**4 Internal monitoring results**

- 4.1 The following is an analysis of the work taken in relation to “quick calls”, which are those telephone enquiries that are recorded on the database. It is important to note that this analysis does not represent all telephone calls as it excludes any sales calls, calls to reception staff intended for other staff or substantive enquiries which we would take up as an appeal.
- 4.2 The number of quick calls recorded on the database between July 2010 and the end of January 2011 was 3,693. Of these, about 70% are dealt with by casework assistants and reception cover, and 30% by other members of the casework team or other staff. The proportion of calls relating to bus services is 67.5% which far exceeds calls we received about other modes at 2,493. This is almost certainly due to the fact that our telephone number is available on every bus.

**Proportion of quick calls**



- 4.3 As a proportion of all quick calls, 54% (1997) were directly referred to the operator for attention and 26% (969) were lost property requests where we provided the appropriate telephone number at the operator. The remaining 20% (727) were general enquiries containing information requests, most of which we were able to answer relatively easily. If we examine quick calls relating to buses only, 51% (1261) were directly referred to the operator for attention and 36% (898) were lost property requests where we provide information that can also be supplied by the operator.
- 4.4 Arguably, signposting is more relevant for quick calls relating to rail services than those relating to bus services as the caller may not know which operator they need to contact in order to resolve their enquiry. In London, to register a complaint about a bus service or driver, it is best to record this through London Buses even if they pass it on to the route operator. Forcing the passenger to call another number may mean that the complaint is not followed through and lost or may lead to the complainant making two calls instead of one.
- 4.5 During January and February this year, we used the Complaints Database to record some basic information on the content of complaints in order to better understand why passengers are telephoning us rather than the operator. This monitoring exercise showed that we receive a huge variety of complaints and this makes it difficult to provide an accurate summary. However, we found that the most significant areas of complaint are:
- the behaviour of bus drivers;
  - requests for travel information (primarily for buses but we also receive significant numbers for rail and tube);
  - bus service delays;
  - lost property;
  - job applications for bus and tube drivers;
  - faulty ticket machines; and
  - Oyster card or reader problems.

For the majority of these issues, we consider that the operators are best placed to deal with the matter and calling us will usually result in the passenger having to make two telephone calls instead of one.

- 4.6 One exception to this is lost property requests where the telephone contact details often differ to the usual customer services number. In these cases, however, we are usually accessing exactly the same information as is provided to TfL's (or railway companies') call centres so we are in effect duplicating their service (albeit at an 0207 rate rather than an 0845 one). For bus passengers, our policy to date has been that as we provide the information supplied to us by London Buses. While we provide a useful service, this is not a core service and in effect duplicates the service provided by operators. In view of the increased pressure on budgets and staffing, we consider that is difficult to justify providing the same level of service in future.
- 4.7 Casework staff report that they frequently have to deal with irate callers who are frustrated that we can't help them with their telephone enquiry. Some callers get angry that, in their view, they have been misdirected by posters to telephone us rather than the operator. Others callers explicitly state that they prefer to phone an

0207 number rather than an 0845 number, but are unhappy when we inform them that we can't resolve their problem and that they need to telephone the operator. As a consumer body, we need to consider whether it is appropriate to inconvenience and add to the costs of passengers by making them make two telephone calls instead of one. We should also be aware of the impact such calls can have on frontline staff.

## **5 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 5.1 Due account will be taken whenever any such implications arise from cases brought to the attention of London TravelWatch.

## **6 Legal powers**

- 6.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider – and, where it appears to it to be desirable, to make representations with respect to – any matter affecting the services and facilities provided by Transport for London which relate to transport (other than freight) and which have been the subject of representations made to it by or on behalf of users of those services and facilities. Section 252A of the same Act (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places a similar duty upon it in respect of representations received from users or potential users of railway passenger services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area.

## **7 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no specific financial implications for London TravelWatch arising from this report.